



REGIONAL SCHOOL UNIT 19

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Mr. Michael Hammer, Superintendent of Schools
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February 23, 2022

Dear RSU community,

It has been a long journey to this point in time. This March marks the two-year point since schools felt the full and sudden impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through it all, we here in RSU 19 have worked together to navigate our way through it in support of our students and staff as best we could given the changing circumstances.

In response to the sharp decline in positive cases in our community, and with vaccines available to all students and staff who want to access them, it is time to create an on-ramp to greater normalcy in our school district.

I am going to recommend that RSU 19 move the following guidelines (unless the CDC/DOE changes the SOP to masking optional prior to that date):

On Monday, March 14, 2022, as long as we continue to see these lower levels of infection, we will move to being mask optional. There has been another recent change to the Maine Center for Disease Control's (MCDC) and Maine Department of Education's (MDOE) Standard Operating Procedures ([SOP](#)) guiding document that defines the rules that schools have followed throughout the pandemic. In this case, the change is removing the requirement to contact trace when a positive case is discovered even if a person is not masked.

What that means is that we don't have to quarantine individuals from school if they are a close contact to a positive case, including people choosing not to wear a mask. The only people who will quarantine from school are those who test positive for COVID-19. Anyone who does test positive will still have to be quarantined for a five-day period and wear a mask for five-days after returning to school.

As long as we continue to see these lower levels of infection, masks will be optional (**masking is still required on the bus as a Federal mandate, until March 18**) among other shifts. Here are a few reasons why we think these adjustments are reasonable at this point in time.

- Significant drop in cases over the past few weeks
- Local districts aligning to being mask optional
- Omicron is less severe
- The change in this new SOP eliminates contact tracing
- Negative social/emotional impacts of masking
- Negative impacts on Learning when masked

Additionally, this date is chosen for the purposes of confirming local case rates after February break, to discuss alignment with Tri-County, and to give us some time to process unknown details of going to masks being optional (for example, availability to safely staff our schools).

It is imperative, as in any case of Covid outbreak or regular influenza, that if people are experiencing symptoms they stay home.

Individuals should continue to stay home when they are sick or have viral symptoms, including any of the following:

- fever or chills
- cough
- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- fatigue
- muscle or body aches
- new loss of taste/smell
- sore throat
- congestion or runny nose
- nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

The time between now and March 14 should give families, who chose not to vaccinate, time to schedule their first or second shots and/or booster shots if they haven't already done so. If between now and our target date we experience a notable increase in positive cases, then we will respond accordingly based on all we've learned about effective mitigation strategies.

Please understand, for the time being we will continue our universal masking which eliminates close contact quarantines and tracing based on the current MDCDC rules as expressed through the SOP.

Health and safety will continue to be our central goal as we continue to address the effects on our students' social/emotional wellness and their learning.

We'll continue to update the community as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Mike Hammer
Superintendent of Schools